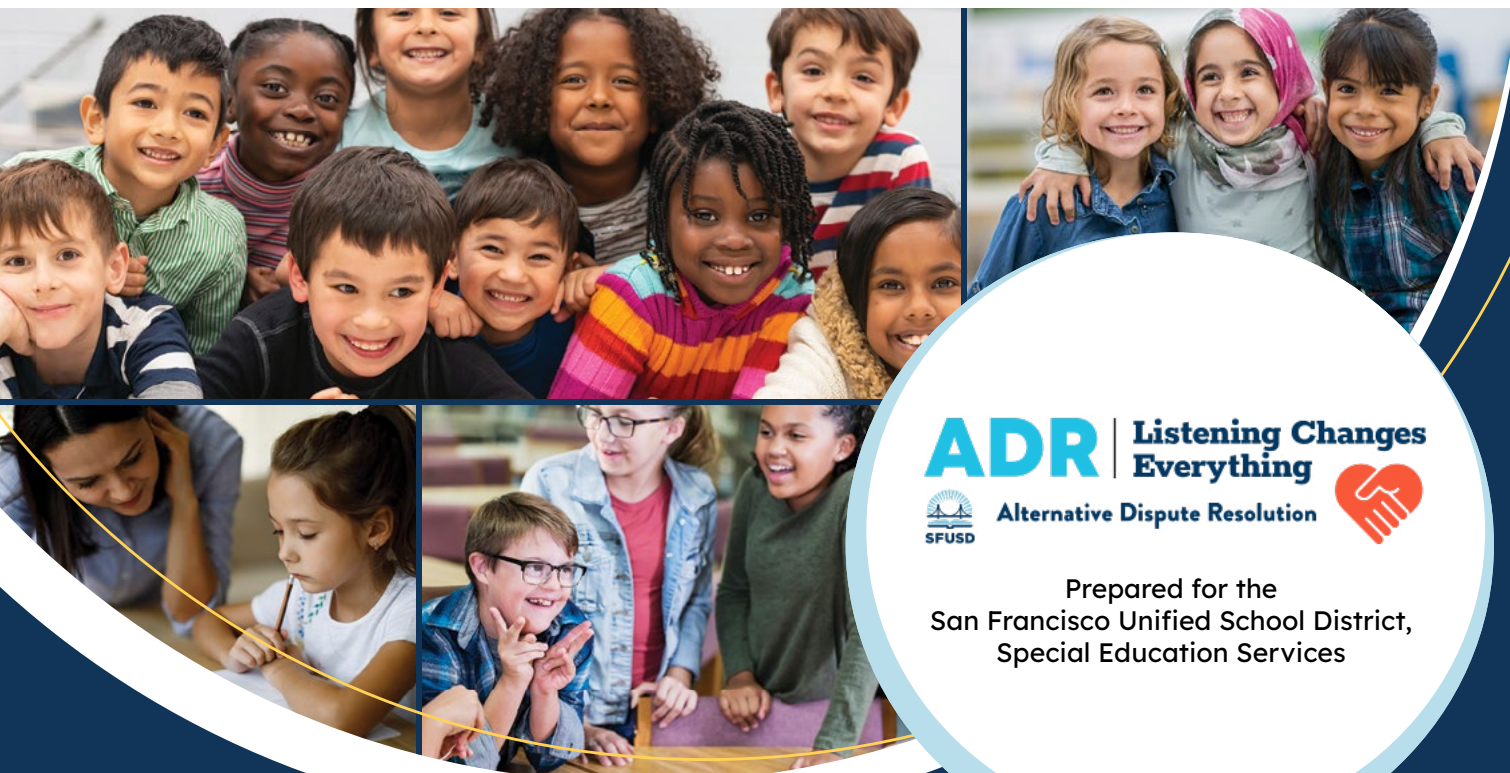




SFUSD Special Education Handbook

A Parent/Guardian's Guide to Your First IEP Meeting



ADR | **Listening Changes Everything**
Alternative Dispute Resolution



Prepared for the
San Francisco Unified School District,
Special Education Services

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Don't miss the last section!

The resources in this guide can be helpful in supporting you and your child.

We Are Here for You

Participating in your child's first **Individualized Education Program** (IEP) can be scary and overwhelming. We hope you find comfort in knowing that you are not alone — there is a full community of people who are ready and available to support you through this process.



The purpose of this guide is to help you navigate each step. It will explain common terms used in an IEP meeting, your legal rights, and how to make sure the IEP addresses your child's learning strengths and needs. **The IEP process is an opportunity to provide support that can shift your child's experiences.** Think of the IEP as an accountability tool between you and the school district that helps ensure your child receives the appropriate education and support(s) they deserve.

This guide is going to give you the essentials at the “tip”. You will never know all the laws and intricacies of the process. But you don't need to know it all — you just need to know you can ask for help, and whom to ask.

Hearing from Other Community Members

This journey might seem overwhelming. It is normal to have a lot of questions. Many families who go through this process feel grief, face many challenges and can become exhausted by all they have to do and know for their child. The IEP process may feel like just one more thing to manage on top of a long list of other challenges. It is not an easy journey but through it we hope you and your child will grow and find a new community that celebrates you and your exceptional child.

Below are some recent testimonials and quotes from families who have navigated the IEP journey and used the guide.

“This Guide helped me to understand my rights, and that I could say no to things that I didn't think would work for my child.”

“This makes IEP's easier to read and understand without being overwhelming.”

-Dorothy Clark,
Parents for Public Schools
of San Francisco

What to Know About the IEP Process

What is an Individualized Education Program?

The **Individualized Education Program** (IEP) is a program that is developed for each public school child who's eligible for special education services. Your child's IEP refers to the process used to create your child's individual plan. This process involves: an IEP meeting(s), and from those meetings, the creation of the actual IEP document. This IEP document outlines how your child should receive the free appropriate public education (FAPE) that they are entitled to while at school, including instructional support inside and outside of the classroom.

According to the California Department of Education, 749,295 individuals were supported with an IEP in 2021. The reality is that each child is unique and learning is not one size fits all.

IEPs are covered by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal special education law. These services and benefits are provided at **no cost to you**. They are created for **eligible students who attend public school, which includes charter schools**. (Students who attend private and parochial schools also receive some benefits under the law.) The IEP is a way to ensure that your child receives the support they deserve.



If your child qualifies for special education, they are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) under the IDEA. An IEP team will be assembled in accordance with the requirements of the IDEA, and every team member will be a meaningful participant on the IEP team. **As the Parent or Guardian, you are an important member of your child's IEP team!** The IEP team will work collaboratively to write the IEP document and to determine what constitutes a FAPE for your child. The school is obligated to make recommendations consistent with the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) necessary to meet your child's unique needs. The goal behind LRE is to support your child's independence and ensure access to their peers in general education.

READ

Read more information about the
[Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#)



An IEP is...

- An individualized learning plan for your child designed to identify your child's unique educational needs
- Co-created with the parent or guardian and school team
- An identification of disability eligibility categories that affect a child's learning
- A legal contract with agreed upon support and services for your child
- An unbiased and informed assessment of ways to support your child's learning
- Confidential and only shared with staff that support your student so they can be informed of your child's learning needs
- Requires parent/guardian consent before the plan can be implemented for your child
- A flexible plan that can change as your child's needs change

An IEP is *not*...

- A carbon copy of the support other students with disabilities receive at your child's school
- Solely written and decided on by the school team without parent input
- A recommendation of optional or voluntary services
- A medical diagnosis! If you have medical concerns please contact your child's pediatrician
- A way to discriminate against your child or their learning needs
- Something that will negatively impact your child's current and future educational opportunities
- A plan the school creates and moves forward on without parent consent or agreement
- A static document that cannot and will not change over time

Benefits of an IEP

- Provides students, families and schools with legal protections.
- Centers families in decisions that impact your child's education.
- Creates protection and guidance in regards to school discipline.

Asking for an IEP

Details about requesting an IEP are detailed below, but in summary, the steps are:

- 1 Request a meeting with your child's teacher and the school administrator.
- 2 Submit a request for a special education assessment in writing to the administrator of your child's school. You may do this at or outside of the meeting scheduled to discuss your parent concerns for your child's learning.
- 3 District must approve or deny your request for an assessment within 15 calendar days. This will be done by sending you a Prior Written Notice.
- 4 If the District approves your request, it must also send you an assessment plan within 15 calendar days of your written request for an assessment.
- 5 You will then have 15 calendar days to review and sign the assessment plan.
- 6 District has 60 calendar days to complete your child's assessment (not including days of school break longer than five school days).
- 7 The results of the assessment are shared with you before or at the IEP meeting.
- 8 If your child qualifies for special education, you and the other members of the IEP team create the IEP document for your child.

CONTACTING YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

If you think your child might need an IEP, your first step is to contact your child's teacher and a school administrator to request a meeting. Use this meeting to share your concerns about how your child is struggling and why you think special education services would help your child do better in school. Take time to explain what subjects and parts of school are challenging for your child, what you see before and after school and what kind of help you think your child might need.

TIP

Send your concerns and meeting request in an email so you have a record of your request and your school team can respond quickly. See [Sample Letter](#).



REQUESTING THE ASSESSMENT

As the parent or guardian, you have the right to request a special education assessment. Once the school receives your written request for an assessment, the district has 15 calendar days to decide if they will move forward with an assessment or not. If the school decides that your child does not need a special education assessment they will notify you in writing in a document called a Prior Written Notice, and may ask you to participate in additional meetings to discuss other support options for your child.

READ

The school district is legally required to create and send a **Prior Written Notice (PWN)** when responding and giving notice but the school will also continue communicating directly with the parents and you are free to contact the school with any questions you have about the PWN.

**ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

If the district agrees to provide an assessment, they will send you an assessment plan within 15 calendar days of your written request for an assessment, identifying all the areas of suspected disability that will be assessed. The purpose of this assessment is to determine whether (1) your child has a qualifying disability and (2) if so, whether your child requires special education and related support to make academic progress. Your child **must** be assessed by a multidisciplinary team that includes teachers and staff from your school site as well as a school psychologist and other special education therapists as needed. If you have any questions about what is being assessed and why, reach out to your school psychologist.

RESULTS

The results of the assessment will be shared at your first IEP meeting. If you think you will need extra time to read the report or will need a translated version of the report, please let your assessment team know as soon as possible.

The IEP Team

The IEP is created through a team effort, and the individuals who attend your child's IEP are called the IEP team. Parents and guardians are an important and full member of the IEP team. Your valuable insights and knowledge about your child will help guide the team. Ask your child's teacher or principal if you have questions or concerns about who will be at the meeting. **Here is who you can expect to be at your child's first IEP meeting:**

You, the Parent/Guardian

You are your child's first teacher and the expert on your child's strengths, needs and ideas for enhancing their education.

General Education Teacher (example: Classroom Teacher)

They are the main educator who interacts with your child the most at school. They can share information about daily classroom expectations and their observations of your child's performance and areas of need.

District Assessor

They administer and interpret the results of your child's special education assessment and if your child is found eligible, they use the results to help the IEP team create an educational program that will support your child's academic needs.

Required IEP Team Members

Special Education Teacher

They have specialized training and experience in educating children with disabilities and in working with other educators to plan how best to support a student with disabilities. This is the person who will most likely provide specialized academic instruction for your child if they are found eligible for special education services.

School Principal

(also known as a Local Education Agency Representative)
They know about general education and special education services in the school district and the resources the district has to support your child's needs if they are found eligible for special education services.

Related Service Provider(s)

This may include related service providers like a speech pathologist, occupational therapist or physical therapist.

Language Interpreter

You can request a language interpreter if needed. They can interpret the meeting in your primary language and help you ask questions. It can take time to schedule an interpreter so be sure to ask for one early in the process.

Your Child

Including your child in their IEP meeting is a great way to build self advocacy. Your child can be invited to all or part of their IEP meeting. High school students can participate in the full meeting and often are encouraged to lead their own meetings.

Additional IEP Team Members

(depending on the needs of your child)

Facilitator

For difficult conversations, you may request a neutral facilitator to support your team.

Representatives from transition services agencies (example: CA Department of Rehabilitation)

Transition services start when a student with an IEP turns 16, and these service providers, if needed, will attend a high school student's IEP meeting to help plan for the future.

Other Individuals

You or the school district can invite individuals with knowledge or special expertise about your child. You can invite anyone you like to join you at your child's first IEP meeting — sometimes having a relative or friend accompanying you and taking notes or listening can be very helpful.



Know Your Rights

Understand that the school cannot move forward with any services without your consent. You have rights! Read through each of the following and check off the ones you have experienced.



THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN IEP MEETINGS

You have the right to participate in IEP meetings that discuss your child's educational needs. You also have the right to ask for an IEP meeting at any time and the school district has 30 days to respond. (You don't have to wait for your annual IEP — if things come up, ask for an IEP meeting!) You can join meetings by phone or video if necessary.

THE RIGHT TO AN INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION

After the school has conducted an evaluation of your child, if you disagree with the results, you may request an independent educational evaluation at school district expense. If the District determines that its evaluation was appropriate, it may deny your request through a Prior Written Notice and request a due process hearing to demonstrate that its assessment was appropriate. The District must either agree to publicly fund the independent educational evaluation or request a due process hearing without unreasonable delay. You may also pay privately for an independent educational evaluation and present it at an IEP meeting. The school must consider the publicly funded or private independent educational evaluation but doesn't have to accept the results.

THE RIGHT TO GIVE (OR DENY) CONSENT

A school must obtain your written permission (called "informed consent") before evaluating your child or providing special education services. You can agree to all, some or none of the services offered. That's called "signing with exception" and it's a great way to make sure your child gets the help they need while you work out the details in areas where there might be disagreement.

THE RIGHT TO DISAGREE WITH A SCHOOL'S DECISION

If you and the school IEP team members cannot reach an agreement, you can ask for the help of a neutral third party facilitator through the SFUSD Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program. If that does not help, you can ask for a due process hearing through the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) in which a hearing officer makes a decision.

READ

Read more information about [Parents' Rights with IEPs](#).



A NOTE ON WITHDRAWING YOUR PERMISSION

You may withdraw your permission for special education in part or in full. You can do this by sending an email to your child's special education teacher or principal. They will forward you the necessary paperwork. If you have any questions about the process, reach out to our school district Ombudsperson or the ADR Program Administrator.

How to Read an IEP

Here are some of the most important things the IEP will include:

ASSESSMENT AND ENGAGEMENT



Your child's present levels of academic and functional performance—how your child is currently doing in school. This includes grades and reports from classroom teachers.

Annual education goals for your child and how the school will track progress.

How your child will participate in standardized tests.

How your child will be included in general education classes and school activities.

The timing of services—when they start, how often they occur and how long they last.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS



Any accommodations—changes to your child's learning environment. For example, extra time for testing, brain breaks, special seating, teacher check for understanding, etc., depending on your child's needs.

Any modifications—changes to what your child is expected to learn or know.

The services your child will receive—this may include special education and related therapies, transportation or summer school (extended school year, ESY) services.

Individualized Transition Plan - is an attachment to the IEP for high school students to help them plan for their goals in adult life.

WHAT ARE IEP GOALS?

An IEP meeting gives you and the school a chance to work together to design an educational program for your child. The goals represent what you and the other IEP team members think your child will be able to accomplish in a year's time. As a parent/guardian, your input will play an important role in developing your child's IEP goals.

HOW ARE GOALS DEVELOPED?

The goals for your child will be based on your child's disability, present levels of achievement and potential for growth. Each child's IEP goals are unique. The IEP team develops goals based on:

- Reports from you
- Teacher assessments
- Performance on state assessments
- Your state's academic content standards by grade level

Goals must relate directly to the needs identified in the present level of performance. They should be prioritized in order of greatest need, and be stated in objective, and measurable terms. Your child may have goals for reading, writing, math, speech, or other areas based on your child's needs. A best practice is to make sure your child's team writes "SMART Goals" that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results Oriented and Time bound.

TIP

Before the meeting, talk to your child's special education teacher about goals you would like your child to work on in the year ahead and create some draft goals together.



WHO CARRIES OUT THE GOALS?

The type of goals the team writes determines who will carry them out. Depending on the type of goal, it may be carried out by:

- A special education teacher
- A general education teacher
- A Related Services Provider, such as a Speech Language Pathologist
- A paraprofessional

TIP

Make sure each goal clearly states who is providing the service and where and how the service will be provided.



A NOTE ON IEP GOALS AND ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS

One Federal Law that protects your child is the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This states:

Schools must set rigorous standards for student achievement in reading, math, and science, and test students using assessments that are aligned with the state's academic content standards. Standards define what children must know and be able to do at each grade level.

Since your child will be tested based on these standards, the goals should be realistic and tailored to your student's learning style. You can read more about it here:

- [FAQs about IEPs and Academic content standards](#)
- [California Content Standards](#)

Sample Reading Goal

By 1/10/2021, after reading/listening to instructional reading level (L) reading selection, given 3 choices, (name) will identify the main events of the plot, their causes, and the influence of each event on future actions with 80% accuracy in 4 of 5 trials as measured by teacher assessments/student work samples.

Sample Math IEP Goal

By 5/23/2023 given models, graph paper and a multiplication chart, (name) will fluently add, subtract, multiply, and divide multi-digit decimals using the standard algorithm for each operation with at least 80% accuracy in 3 trials as measured by student work samples and teacher observation, and teacher created tests.

Sample Social Emotional Goal

By 1/10/2021, when (name) becomes upset, frustrated, or angry, she will use a self regulation/coping strategy (movement break, deep breathing, quiet space break, deep pressure/heavy work activity, etc.) to avoid engaging in an unexpected behavior, with one reminder, in 80% of instances of conflicts with peers or adults, as measured by observations and documentation.

HOW MANY GOALS ARE ENOUGH?

Often IEPs include too many goals. This can be confusing to you and the teachers and put unrealistic expectations on your child. To keep the number manageable, consider setting one goal for each “big” area of concern. For example, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, math calculation, or study skills.

WHEN CAN YOU EXPECT PROGRESS REPORTS?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that your child's IEP include a description of how and when progress will be measured. Periodic reports on your child's progress toward their IEP goals should be issued at least as often as those issued to parents of students without a disability, for example, at the same time report cards are issued.

SAMPLE PROGRESS REPORT

The two examples below show what a progress report on improvement of a child's math computation skills within a single grading period might look like:

Example 1

"At the end of the first grading period, given 10 problems requiring two-digit plus two-digit addition without renaming (regrouping/carrying)(e.g., $14 + 11 =$), Keisha wrote the sums with 80% accuracy, as measured by a valid, curriculum-based assessment."

Example 2

"At the end of the second grading period, given 10 problems requiring two-digit plus two-digit addition with renaming (e.g., $14 + 18 =$), Jorge wrote the sums with 80% accuracy, as measured by a valid, curriculum-based assessment."

TIP

As the parent of a child with an IEP, you should communicate regularly with teachers and other school professionals, to ensure that your child is making measurable progress toward their IEP goals, this will help you avoid "surprises" during parent/teacher conferences and IEP meetings.



WHAT IF THERE'S NO PROGRESS?

Sometimes parents and schools have different expectations about whether progress is being made toward a child's IEP goals or how quickly it's happening. Ideally, for academic deficits in reading and math, your child's IEP goals should be aligned to your state's grade level content standards, but your child's learning style is unique and learning outcomes must also be realistic.

If you're still concerned after you talk with your child's teacher about progress towards IEP goals ask for an **IEP Meeting**. You can do this by sending an email to your child's special education teacher or a school administrator. You can also request other staff who you consider supporters, such as an afterschool provider or other staff member you have a relationship with. Once district staff receive your request for a meeting, the meeting must take place 30 days from the date the request was received.

TIP

[Sample Letter to Request](#) an IEP Meeting
(edit or change this letter as needed to meet your needs)

**NOTE**

There is no such thing as an “Emergency IEP”. You can request an IEP meeting at any time to discuss concerns about your child.

Preparing for Your First IEP Meeting

What You Will Need for Your First Meeting

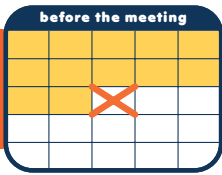
An important part of preparing for your first IEP is checking in with your feelings. All of this information can be very overwhelming and it's normal to feel emotional; at any given moment, you might experience: sadness, anger, fear, anxiousness, a sense of being lost, confused, overwhelmed, tired, hopeless and/or a sense of relief at finally getting some help for your child.

Please know you have allies among your school community who are rooting for your child's success. On the next page we will share some things you can do to help you feel more at ease, prepared, and able to participate in planning your child's educational program as a full member of the IEP team.



Circle any that you have felt, and add any additional emotions that come up for you.

Sadness	Tired	Supported
Anger	Hopeless	Curious
Fear	Alone	Trusting
Anxiousness	Scared	Eager
Overwhelmed	Exhausted	Excited
Lost	Frustrated	_____
Confused	Skeptical	_____

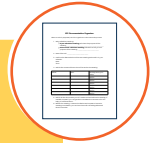


Before the IEP Meeting

Many parents feel anxious before IEP meetings. Here are a few things you can do to prepare for the meeting. **Don't worry**, these are just suggestions, take on as little or as much as feels right for you.

TIP

Print out this [IEP Documentation Organizer](#) to help you keep track of information and stay organized.



Before the meeting, **try to connect and build a positive relationship with at least one person** on the IEP team, such as the classroom teacher, principal, or school psychologist. Ask them questions about what to expect. This will help you feel more comfortable during the meeting.

Plan ahead and write down your thoughts or any questions, so you won't forget to mention what's important to you during the meeting. There are no silly or bad questions. Use the Documentation Organizer to gather your information and stay organized.

TIP

Share your thoughts and questions with your child's teacher to build the agenda collaboratively.



Ask who will be attending, so you won't be surprised by the number of people around the table and understand their roles.

Ask to see any forms available to review ahead of time and/or share the results of a private evaluation with the IEP team so they can be familiar with the data. If you need any of the forms to be translated into a language other than English, it is your right to request that the forms be translated prior to your meeting so you have time to review them in your language of choice. Please allow up to 14 days for a document to be translated.

If you have requested a facilitator for your child's IEP meeting, be sure to set aside some time to chat with the facilitator before the meeting.

Request to record the meeting. You can request to audio record the meeting so you can listen to the recording later. Make sure you notify the district 24 hours in advance if you want to record. *Be aware that if you are recording the meeting the district will also record the meeting.*

Request an interpreter if you need to do so and plan for additional time so you don't feel rushed.

during the meeting

During the IEP Meeting



Actively participate. Share your thoughts and ask questions. Understand that, as the parent, **you are an important part of the IEP team.**

Your child is amazing! Find a way to share your child's talents and quirks. When you talk about them, make them recognizable to all team members. Remember that you know your child best — strengths, talents, interests and needs, so take in what the professionals have to say, and add your perspective.

Bring a photograph of your child and place it in the middle of the table, to help keep the discussion student-focused.

Listen to understand. Try to understand the perspectives being shared by each of the experts who make up your child's IEP team. Be prepared to hear about your child's assessment date and observation from the team. This may be different from your perspective and it will offer another point of view to support your child's educational planning.

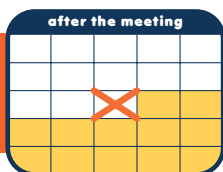
Keep focused. Focus on what you want answered or services provided for your child. The professionals will help offer strategies to help your child get there.

Ask questions! The team may use jargon and acronyms; it's okay to ask them to pause and clarify anything you are unclear about. It's okay not to know! The more questions you ask the more likely you'll be able to leave the meeting feeling clear about next steps. This will help you communicate the plan to your child.

IEP meetings can feel stressful — **bring a stress ball or a bottle of water** or even ask for a short break if you need it.

Bring a trusted person with you. Consider bringing your spouse, partner, family member, neighbor, friend or service provider so you have a support system and another set of ears to hear what the IEP team has to say. This work takes a village, and having support from someone who is there for **you** will let you show up for your student. (If you decide to bring a friend or advocate, you may want to inform the school so they are aware of who you're bringing.)

Assume good intentions. Remember, the purpose of this group coming together is to help your child!



After the IEP Meeting

At the end of your IEP meeting you will be asked to sign and consent to the IEP. You have a few options when signing the IEP:

Sign the attendance form, this shows that you were at the meeting. Signing the attendance form does not mean you consent to the IEP.

If you AGREE with the entire IEP, sign the IEP so the school can move forward and provide special education services for your child.

If you AGREE WITH ONLY PARTS of the IEP, let the school know so the services you do agree with can begin for your child. Once you sign the first IEP, you have granted permission for the school to provide ongoing special education services for your child.

If you DON'T AGREE with the IEP, identify which parts of the IEP you disagree with — you can write down the parts you disagree with right on the signature page. The school will want to hold another IEP meeting to discuss your concerns.

NOTE

Ask to take the IEP home to review if you need time to make a final decision at the meeting. You can sleep on it, ask school staff questions about anything you don't understand or get a second opinion from any of the resources in this document.

TIP

You are not required to sign the IEP if you disagree or if you're uncertain about what it contains. However, a signed parent/guardian permission is necessary before the IEP can go into effect.



Understanding the IEP Timeline

Concerns About Student Progress

If the caregiver or school has concerns about student's academic progress, attendance, behavior, or social/emotional functioning; reach out to your child's teacher or social worker to hold a Student Success Team (SST) meeting to discuss concerns.

Caregiver Rights Interventions in general education are recommended before evaluating for special education, but caregivers always have the right to request an evaluation.

Student Success Team (SST)

SST is a meeting to discuss concerns, analyze issues impacting student progress, and identify resources to support needs. The team (caregiver, teacher, relevant staff members) can start general education interventions or report progress on ongoing interventions. The team may refer for a special education evaluation if an educational disability* is suspected or continue tracking effectiveness (and implementation) of interventions.

General Education Intervention

School staff provide interventions and monitor student response. After set period, the team holds follow-up meeting to discuss whether student has made adequate progress with the interventions.

No Referral

Adequate progress — no educational disability* suspected. Student will continue to be supported through general education.

Referral

If an educational disability* is suspected, an assessment plan covering all areas** of concern (with assessors listed) will be sent to the caregiver. Caregiver must decline/consent to the evaluation, sign, and return it to school.

Evaluation

The evaluation is completed within 60 calendar days. Evaluation procedures include a variety of strategies and tools (i.e. testing, interviews, observations) to gather information related to the student's educational needs, including information provided by the caregiver.

Eligibility Review: Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meeting

The IEP team (caregiver, assessor(s), teacher, special education teacher, administrator) meets to discuss evaluation results, eligibility for special education, and potential goals and services.

Does Not Qualify

Team discusses general education supports, as needed.

Qualifies for Special Education

Student demonstrates an educational disability* and a need for specially designed instruction and related services to make academic progress. An IEP is a legal agreement between the school district and the caregiver offering special education services to the student, specific to their needs. The IEP does not start until caregiver signs to agree to all, parts of, or none of the services.

*13 Educational Disabilities (California Code of Regulations)

Autism
Speech & Language Impairment
Specific Learning Disability (SLD)
Other Health Impairment (OHI)
Emotional Disturbance (ED)
Intellectual Disability (ID)
Hard of Hearing

Deafness
Deaf-Blind
Visually Impaired
Traumatic Brain Injury
Orthopedic Impairment
Multiple Disabilities

**Potential Areas for Evaluation

Academic, Health, Cognitive, Language/Speech Communication, Motor, Social/ Emotional, Adaptive, Post-Secondary Transition, other areas as needed

Signing the IEP

Here are some of the most important things the IEP will include:

- If you have agreed to the IEP, review the IEP to make sure you understand it and all the important parts of the discussion are included. This [IEP checklist](#) from Understood.org is a handy tool.
- **Talk to your child, so they will understand what was discussed at the IEP meeting.** Your child needs to understand what their goals (and objectives or benchmarks, if any) are; as they get older, they should be involved in developing them, as well. The more they are aware of what they are working on, the greater their chances of success.

NOTE

Remember you can always change your mind and withdraw permission for any or all of the parts of the IEP you agreed to and you can always request another IEP meeting if things are not working.



Tips for Staying Organized



Place the IEP in the binder or file where you keep other school notices and reports.

Mark your calendar with the dates that you can expect to receive regular reports from the school of your child's progress toward their annual IEP goals.

Meet with your child's special education teacher to share observations and to learn how you can reinforce at home the skills and strategies being taught to them at school.

Develop a collaborative relationship with the professionals who interact regularly with your child. Find time to check in with them and ask for updates.

READ

Read more about [organizing your child's IEP paperwork](#).



REVIEWING AND REVISING THE IEP

The IEP is reviewed at least once a year. If you or the teacher believe that your child isn't learning, making progress, or has achieved the goals sooner than expected, a meeting may be scheduled to revise the IEP. If you feel that an IEP review meeting is needed, put your request in writing and send it to the school and/or district administrator. Schools must hold an IEP meeting within 30 days from the date of the receipt of the written request.

[Sample Letter to Share Your Concerns About the IEP](#)

NOTE

When the school recommends a change in a child's services or placement, they must inform families in writing before the change. This is called a **Prior Written Notice (PWN)**. This notice is also required for any IEP meetings and evaluations. Families also have "**stay put**" rights to keep services in place should there be a disagreement about the IEP. "Stay put" refers to the idea that if there is a disagreement about the IEP the school will continue with the current services in the signed IEP until an agreement is reached.

START THE NEW YEAR OFF RIGHT

At the start of each school year, introduce yourself to school staff and give a quick introduction of your child to their new teacher. This is also a good time to ask the school for the latest copy of your IEP. Making sure everyone is on the same page at the start of the new year can go a long way.

Supporting Your Child with Their IEP

It's never too early to include your child in the IEP process. While federal law requires that your child be included in the IEP meeting whenever transition services are going to be discussed (those discussions begin with the first IEP to be in effect when your child turns 16), many IEP teams find that including elementary and middle school age children in the IEP process can be very helpful.



NOTE

When your child turns 18, they will be the adult making decisions about their own placement. They will be deciding about what services they need and who will be invited to their IEP meetings.

- | | | | |
|----------|---|----------|---|
| 1 | TALK TO YOUR CHILD about what was discussed at the IEP meeting in terms they will understand. | 4 | SHARE THE NAMES OF THE ADULTS who will be working with them closely. |
| 2 | Be sure to START WITH THE POSITIVES — the progress they made, the number of people supporting them, and examples of the kind things the other adults in the meeting said about them. | 5 | LET THEM ASK QUESTIONS. |
| 3 | REVIEW GOALS AND OBJECTIVES so they will know what they will be working on during the coming year. | 6 | ASK FOR THEIR IDEAS and suggestions. |
| | | 7 | AFFIRM THEM and continue to let them know there is nothing wrong with having an IEP. |

Talking to Your Child About Disabilities

Talking with your child about a sensitive topic like a disability is not easy. But it may be one of the most important things you can do to foster their learning and emotional development. It is okay to not have all the answers. Be honest with your child and let them know you are learning together.

When kids experience learning difficulties as a result of different abilities without understanding what's going on, they're apt to imagine the worst and blame themselves. Talking openly about disabilities shows kids there's nothing to be ashamed of. The first conversation can be hard, so try to keep it simple. Tell your child that everyone is different in some way.

Below is some general information about students' needs for information about disabilities at various ages and best practices on how to engage in the conversation.

GRADES K-3

Even young children worry about their performance in school. In the primary grades (K through 3), most students begin to identify what they do well and what they have trouble with. Whether it's school work or athletics, kids begin the process of self-assessment and peer comparison. When you address your child's learning differences, assure them that you and their teachers are working together to help them do well in school, so that they don't have to do it all alone! If you feel it's appropriate, have them participate in informal meetings about learning challenges and goals with you and the teacher. If they are directly involved in the solution, it's more likely they'll be committed to improving.

GRADES 4 AND 5

By the upper elementary grades (4 and 5), students should have a good sense of their academic strengths and areas of growth. If your child identifies themselves as a "poor" or "slow" student, help them understand their disability. Let them know that, for some academic subjects, they just need some very specific strategies to help them learn. Be honest about their difficulties, but provide factual information about their strengths and the things they do well. Help them understand that their learning challenges are just one part of who they are and do not define them.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

In middle school students will be aware of the differences in their ability to access their education. Remind them that all students learn differently and special education ensures their right to access education even if the teachers need to support them in a different way. At this age your child may feel some apprehension to discussing these issues as they are very focused on peer interactions. Remind your child that teachers help all children and that they try to appropriately accommodate all students and all the differences in the classroom.

HIGH SCHOOL AND OLDER

In high school and beyond, it is important for students to understand not only their disability but also how to advocate for themselves. This is a great time for students to learn how to lead their own IEPs and to practice communicating with teachers about their needs. All of this practice helps students prepare to independently advocate for themselves in college and at work.

TIP

When you can talk to your child about their learning disabilities in a knowledgeable and caring manner, there's a greater likelihood that they'll maintain their self-esteem, develop effective coping strategies, and learn to appreciate the diversity of their talents, both in and out of school. Ultimately, self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-respect, and hard work will be the keys to their success.



Practices to Engage in Conversation with Your Child

PRACTICE

TRY SAYING...

1

Engage your child regularly in a conversation to find out how they currently understand how they learn and their learning differences.

“Can you share with me what is challenging about doing the multiplication steps?”

2

Listen actively and carefully to draw out your child’s thoughts and uncover any misunderstandings.

“I’d like to hear a little more about how ‘things get all messed up’ when you try to copy words off the whiteboard.”

3

Acknowledge honestly that your child is having a difficult time.

“Yes, I know reading is very hard for you; and when school work takes that much effort, it can make you feel really tired.”

4

Accept their feelings of anger, frustration, or anxiety as an understandable response to their learning struggles.

“I know that math is really frustrating for you; I don’t blame you for getting angry.”

5

Be specific about the identified learning challenge so that it feels manageable and solvable.

Rather than saying, “You have language problems,” try, “You have a hard time answering your teacher out loud in class.”

6

Let them know they are not alone.

“Your teachers and I will work with you — you are not in this alone.”

7

Share their goals and reassure them that they can take a series of small steps to achieve them.

“Your teacher and tutor are going to help you memorize your multiplication facts through 5 by winter break; this week and next, they’re going to show you a way to remember the 2’s.”

8

Recognize your child’s progress and give them praise and encouragement along the way.

“Remember when you didn’t think you could even read one page of that book? Now look at you!”

9

Balance the discussion of their challenges with reminders about their strengths and talents.

“Yeah, I know you missed a couple of spelling words this week, but you’re improving. And your teacher says you’re doing a really super job on your science fair project; you can be very proud of that.”

10

Reassure them that learning challenges are just one part of who they are.

“You’re great at making people laugh, and you can always get the kids on your baseball team to try their hardest. Your reading challenges can never mess up those strengths.”

TIP

One great way to make sure your child sees their disability in a positive light is to read inclusive books. The [SFUSD Inclusion website](#) has many different book lists and resources for all kinds of students and families.

**AND WHAT ABOUT YOU?**

This work ahead can be hard but remember that you are not alone and you don't need to understand it all, or do it all at once. Use the information in this guide to start your journey and remember this is a marathon, *not a sprint*. Don't be afraid to ask people for help and to pause so you can ask questions. There are a lot of resources available to you and it can be overwhelming. Ask your IEP Team to share their top resources and connect you with other people in the community who can help answer your questions.

All the emotions and challenges your student will face will impact you as well, so make sure to take care of yourself and get support when you need it. Have 2-3 people who can support you when you are feeling frustrated, overwhelmed or exhausted and who can share in celebrating the successes. As the saying goes, "remember to put your own oxygen mask on first".

Acknowledgments

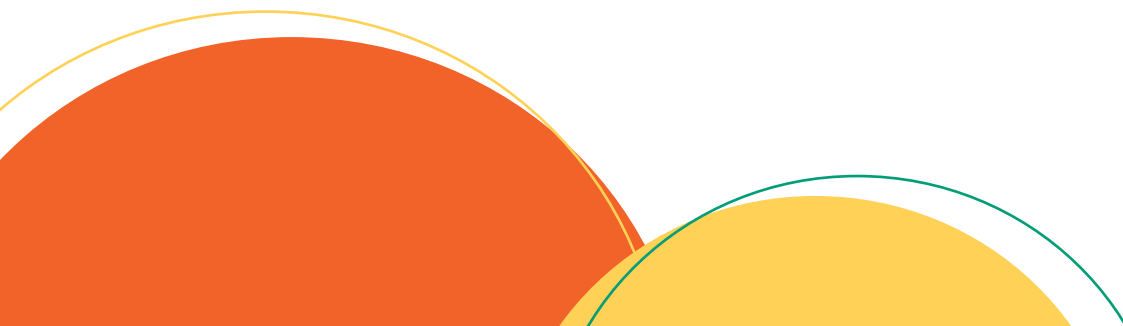
We wish to acknowledge and express gratitude to all the people who are engaged in this process. Thank you for your time, passion, and dedication in supporting our students and families.

This guide was created based on continued feedback and input from many families, individuals, and community members who are passionate about ensuring students with disabilities and their families are provided with all of the necessary tools they need to make the most of their education.

A special thanks to:

- **Coleman Advocates**
- **Community Alliance for Special Education (CASE)**
- **Parents for Public Schools San Francisco (PPSF)**
- **SFUSD Administrators, Teachers and Staff**
- **SFUSD African American Achievement & Leadership Initiative (AAALI)**
- **SFUSD African American Parent Advisory Council (AAPAC)**
- **SFUSD Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)**
- **SFUSD Community Advisory Committee (CAC) for Special Education**
- **SFUSD District English Learners Advisory Committee (DELAC)**
- **SFUSD Fa'aSāmoa Initiative**
- **SFUSD Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander Mātua Advisory Council (MAC)**
- **SFUSD Special Education Services Administrators, Teachers and Staff**
- **SFUSD Special Education Services School Psychologists**
- **SFUSD Student & Family Services Division**
- **Support for Families of Children with Disabilities**
- **The Bar Association of San Francisco**

Lastly, thank **YOU** — to the families, who support full inclusion and make it the norm. Your feedback and wisdom is the very thing that keeps this work and community going. We are grateful for your commitment, compassion, and care.



San Francisco has a very large and active disability community and many supportive organizations that can help you navigate the road ahead. We have shared some of our favorite resources and materials to support your learning.

[SFUSD Special Education Handbook Resources](#)



SFUSD Special Education Handbook Resources

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In this section, we have shared some of our favorite resources and materials to support your learning.

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SFUSD Special Education Resources

Have a Special Education Question? Here is how to contact us:

- Special Education Contact List: sfusd.edu/sped/contact
- Early Education Special Education Assessments: ecreferrals@sfusd.edu
- Special Education Records: spedrecords.request@sfusd.edu
- Private and Parochial School Special Education Assessments: privateschoolreferrals@sfusd.edu
- Special Education Ombudsperson: Julia Martin: martinj5@sfusd.edu
- All other questions - Special Education Contact Form: bit.ly/contactSFUSDSpEd (case sensitive)

Special Education Services Office
3045 Santiago St.
San Francisco, CA 94116
TELEPHONE: (415) 759-2222
WEBSITE: sfusd.edu/sped

SFUSD Special Education Dispute Resolution

The SFUSD Special Education Services Department strives to meet the educational needs of each child with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). However, disagreements occasionally arise. When a disagreement arises, the first step is to talk to your child's special education or general teacher about your concerns.

PROBLEM SOLVING STEPS FOR PARENTS

1. Review your child's IEP and determine if the plan is being implemented. Does it need to change to meet any changing needs of your child? You may request a review of the IEP at any time. A meeting must be held within 30 days of your request.
2. Discuss the problem with your child's classroom teacher and/or other school staff member who knows your child's needs. This can include your child's resource teacher, counselor, hearing or speech therapist, or other specialist helping your child.
3. Next, discuss the issue with the principal and/or request an IEP meeting to discuss your concerns. If an IEP meeting does not bring a resolution, please contact the Special Education Content Specialist or Special Education Supervisor for your child's school. Parents/guardians may use the [contact page](#) on the special education website or [special education contact list](#) to find the name and contact information of the Content Specialist and/or Supervisor for your school. Parents/guardians may use this special education contact list to find the name and contact information of the Content Specialist and/or Supervisor for your school.
4. Families may also contact Julia Martin, the [SFUSD Ombudsperson](#) at martinj5@sfusd.edu or (415) 447-7802. The ombudsperson services are free, neutral and confidential. The Ombudsperson helps families navigate the special education process and can investigate complaints and concerns. She can provide advice on the special education process, inform parents of their rights and connect families to special education resources in the community.
5. Adriana Aro, the SFUSD Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program Administrator. She can be contacted at (415) 823-4051 and can offer support and help access various [ADR services and resources](#). For example, you may be assigned a professional neutral facilitator from the Bar Association of San Francisco. Your facilitator could support you and your IEP team by facilitating your IEP, holding a Collaborative Conference, or offering Communication Coaching. Your facilitator would work to understand each participant's goal, and would support each party to engage in a process that supports improved communication, restored collaboration, and the reaching of fair and equitable mutual agreements.
6. Additionally, parents/guardians may contact [Support for Families of Children with Disabilities](#) to access information, resources, referrals and guidance. The Support for Families Family Resource Specialists provide information in English, Spanish, Cantonese, and Mandarin.

When a dispute between the District and the parent/guardian of a student with disabilities cannot be resolved at the school level, the District or parent/guardian may request alternative dispute resolution, mediation and/or a due process hearing with the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), or file a complaint with the California Department of Education.

SPECIAL EDUCATION COMPLAINT PROCESS OPTIONS:

1. Participate in Alternative Dispute Resolution process

The SFUSD Special Education Services Department has partnered with [The Bar Association of San Francisco](#) (BASF) to offer strategies to resolve complaints with the school district regarding the learning needs of your child. Neutral, trained facilitators who offer skilled mediation for the prevention and resolution of complaints between parents/guardians and school district personnel in a cooperative forum of problem-solving are provided through BASF for each of these strategies.

2. File a Mediation Only and/or Formal Due Process with the Office of Administrative Hearings Special Education Division

“Mediation Only” is a state-level, voluntary dispute resolution process with OAH. In Mediation Only, a neutral mediator assists you and the District in discussing and attempting to resolve your disagreement. The Mediation Only process includes a mediation conference attended by you, the assigned mediator, and a District representative who has decision-making authority. Lawyers or advocates, for the student/parent or for the District, are not permitted to participate in Mediation Only. Due process complaints provide a way to request a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Either parents or the District may file a due process complaint on any matter relating to a proposal or refusal to initiate or change the identification, evaluation or educational placement of a student, or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

3. File a complaint with the California Department of Education

A written signed complaint is a formal request to the CDE to investigate allegations in which the complainant believes the public agency (e.g. student’s school district) has violated federal or state special education law or regulation. Complaints may concern one child or student, or a group of students. Anyone, including parents, students, teachers, and agency representatives may file complaints. The CDE then issues an investigative Report, determining whether the District complied with applicable laws.

For additional dispute resolution options please visit our website:

sfusd.edu/sped/dispute-resolution

San Francisco Disability Resources

California Children Services (CCS) Program

Services are provided by California Children's Services for 2,500 infants, children and youth in San Francisco with severe medical conditions or physical disabilities.

333 Valencia 4th Floor

San Francisco, CA 94103

TELEPHONE: (628) 217-6700

WEBSITE LINK:

sfdph.org/dph/comupg/oprograms/php/ccs/default.asp

Golden Gate Regional Center

The Golden Gate Regional Center has the primary responsibility for early intervention services for children aged 0 to 3 years old.

1355 Market Street, Suite 220

San Francisco, CA 94103

TELEPHONE: (415) 546-9222

WEBSITE LINK: ggrc.org

Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education — San Francisco Office

Enforces federal civil rights laws that protect the rights of individuals and entities from unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, or sex in health and human services.

50 United Nations Plaza

Mail Box 1200, Room 1545

San Francisco, CA 94102

TELEPHONE: (415) 486-5555

WEBSITE LINK:

ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html

Mayor's Office on Disability

The mission of the Mayor's Office on Disability is to ensure that every program, service, benefit, activity and facility operated or funded by the City and County of San Francisco is fully accessible to, and usable by, people with disabilities.

1155 Market Street, 1st Floor

San Francisco, CA 94103

TELEPHONE: (415) 554-6789

WEBSITE LINK:

sf.gov/departments/mayors-office-disability

SFUSD Community Advisory Committee for Special Education

The state Education Code mandates that each Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA) has a Community Advisory Committee (CAC). The purpose of the CAC is to advise the Board of Education on special education policies, programs, priorities and parent education in the SELPA. The CAC monitors how special education law is being implemented within the SELPA.

EMAIL: cacspedsf@gmail.com

WEBSITE LINK: cacspedsf.com

SFUSD Special Education Services Office

The San Francisco Unified School District is dedicated to identify, locate and assess all students within the district from birth to 22 years of age who may have disabilities, as well as provide appropriate support and/or related services to those students as determined by an educational evaluation.

3045 Santiago St.

San Francisco, CA 94116

TELEPHONE: (415) 759-2222

WEBSITE LINK: sfusd.edu/sped

Support for Families of Children with Disabilities

Families of children with disabilities will have the information, resources and support they need to make informed choices for their children.

1663 Mission Street, Suite 700

San Francisco, CA 94103

TELEPHONE: (415) 282-7494

Warmline: (415) 920-5040

WEBSITE LINK: supportforfamilies.org

Community Resources

Coleman Advocates

Coleman Advocates believes that all children and families deserve access to high quality education, living wage jobs, family-supporting benefits, affordable housing, and a voice in the decisions that affect us.

459 Vienna Street
San Francisco, CA 94112

TELEPHONE: (415) 239-0161

WEBSITE LINK: colemanadvocates.org

Family Voices of California

Family Voices of California is a statewide collaborative of parent-run centers working to ensure quality health care for children and youth with special health care needs.

1663 Mission Street, 7th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103

TELEPHONE: (415) 282-7494

WEBSITE LINK: familyvoicesofca.org

National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) - San Francisco

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the nation's largest grassroots organization dedicated to improving the lives of individuals living with a mental health condition and their families.

1388 Sutter Street, Suite 600
San Francisco, CA 94109

Help Line: (415) 237-0039

EMAIL: info@namisf.org

WEBSITE LINK: namisf.org

Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability

The Paul K. Longmore Institute on Disability at San Francisco State University studies and showcases disabled people's experiences to revolutionize social views. Through public education, scholarship and cultural events, the Longmore Institute shares disability history and theory, promotes critical thinking, and builds a broader community.

San Francisco State University

1600 Holloway Avenue
Humanities Building, Room 135
San Francisco, CA 94132

Email: pklinst@sfsu.edu

TELEPHONE: (415) 405-3528

WEBSITE LINK: longmoreinstitute.sfsu.edu

Parents for Public Schools San Francisco

We believe that public education is a fundamental right for all children. We believe that strong San Francisco public schools create a strong city for all of us. We believe that engaged, empowered parents are crucial to the success of our children and our schools.

TELEPHONE: (415) 861-7077

WEBSITE LINK: ppssf.org

SF Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF)

The Department of Children, Youth and Their Families (DCYF) has administered San Francisco's powerful investments in children, youth, transitional age youth, and their families through the Children and Youth Fund since 1991.

1390 Market Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94102,

TELEPHONE: (628) 652-7100

EMAIL: info@dcyf.org

WEBSITE LINK: dcyf.org

Special Olympics Northern California

Special Olympics provides year-round sports training and competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for people eight years of age or older with developmental disabilities.

3480 Buskirk Ave, #340
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

TELEPHONE: (925) 944-8801

Email: info@sonc.org

WEBSITE LINK: sonc.org

Learn More About the Law

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - US Department of Education

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. The IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 7.5 million (as of school year 2020-21) eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

Read more: sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF)

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF), founded in 1979, is a leading national civil rights law and policy center directed by individuals with disabilities and parents who have children with disabilities. We train and educate people with disabilities and parents of children with disabilities about their rights under state and federal disability rights laws so they can use the laws as tools to challenge exclusion and discrimination, and advocate effectively for full participation in the lives of their communities.

Read more: dredf.org

The Special Education Fundamentals of IDEA from the Special Edge Newsletter, Fall 2018

Every child with a disability has the right to be educated with his or her grade-level peers without disabilities. This right also applies to children with disabilities who attend charter schools. This right is the law—specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which governs and guides the public education of all children with disabilities in the United States. Realizing the vision of IDEA involves having and holding high expectations for each and every student so all students have the opportunity to realize their dreams. What exactly this means—in statute, in intent, and in practice—points to a public education system that supports and ensures equity, access, and inclusion for each and every child and student with a disability.

Read more: drive.google.com/file/d/1FIvEoDHIAJuKCI-pWNkyDNvb4Y3-6U5n/view

Special Education Rights & Responsibilities Manual from Disability Rights of California

The Federal and California special education laws give eligible students with disabilities the right to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This manual explains how to become eligible for special education, how to request and advocate for special education services, and what to do if you disagree with school districts.

Read more: serr.disabilityrightscalifornia.org

Wright's Law — IDEA 2004

Parents, advocates, teachers, and attorneys come to Wrightslaw for reliable, up-to-date information about special education law and advocacy for children with disabilities. The information in [IDEA 2004 at Wrightslaw](https://www.wrightslaw.com/idea) will help you find answers to your questions.

Read more: www.wrightslaw.com/idea

Things to Know About an Individualized Education Program (IEP)

U.S. Department of Education — IDEA Resources for Parents and Families

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

Supports projects that provide information and technical assistance to families of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. These projects also support families whose children are suspected of having a disability or developmental delay or who may be inappropriately identified as needing special education and related services. Information and assistance from these OSEP-funded projects are available free of charge. Families can find information about [IDEA-specific topics through these centers](#).

Read More: sites.ed.gov/idea/parents-families

Parent Training and Information Centers (PTI)

Provide services in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Pacific entities. PTIs are a rich source of information and training especially for parents, including parents whose primary language is not English or themselves have special training needs. In addition, Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRC) throughout the country serve targeted, underserved communities. To find the PTI or CPRC that serves your community or to locate additional informational materials for families, visit the [Center on Parent Information and Resources](#).

Read More: ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html

Center for Parent Information and Resources — All About the IEP

When a child receives special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), he or she must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This is a written document listing, among other things, the special educational services that the child will receive. The IEP is developed by a team that includes the child's parents and school staff.

The IEP is an extremely important document in the educational lives of students with disabilities receiving special education under IDEA. The resources we've listed below will help you learn more about IEPs—what the law requires, what information a typical IEP contains, how IEPs are developed, and so on.

Read more: parentcenterhub.org/iep

Understood.org — The IEP meeting: An overview

The IEP meeting is one of the most important parts of the special education process. In this meeting, school staff and parents come together to discuss, develop, and review a student's IEP. They make sure the IEP meets the student's needs.

There are rules for IEP meetings. They cover who must attend and what happens. The best way to understand these rules is to remember the goal of the meeting. The school and parents are working together to plan a student's special education experience at school.

Read more: understood.org/en/articles/the-iep-meeting-an-overview

Tips for a Successful IEP Meeting

Questions to Ask Before, During and After an IEP meeting from Understood.org

Even if it's not your first one, IEP meetings can still be confusing at times. Asking questions can help you be more informed, prepared, and confident as a member of the IEP team.

Read more:

understood.org/en/articles/questions-to-ask-before-and-during-your-childs-iep-meeting

5 Tips for Incredibly Successful IEP Meetings from Wrightslaw.com

Do you get a knot in your stomach when you receive a call, letter, or email inviting you to an IEP meeting?

Do you have questions about what you should say? Not say? If you are like many parents, you don't realize you have a unique role in developing your child's IEP. In 5 Tips for Incredibly Successful IEP Meetings, we answer questions from parents about the parental role at IEP meetings, what to do and not do, managing your emotions, and why you need to protect the parent-school relationship.

Read more: wrightslaw.com/info/iep.mtg.5rules.htm

FREE Monthly IEP Clinics presented by Support for Families

These monthly meetings are offered in English, Spanish and Cantonese. Learn about Special Education law, the IEP process, what to do when things aren't working, and how to become a more active and effective team member.

Presented in Cantonese: 1st Thursdays; 6-7:00pm

Presented in English: 2nd Thursdays; 4-6:00pm

Presented in Spanish: 3rd Thursdays; 4-6:00pm

To register, please call our Warmline at (415) 920-5040 or email info@supportforfamilies.org

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meeting Checklist from Bright Futures

Bright Futures is a national health promotion initiative dedicated to the principle that every child deserves to be healthy and that optimal health involves a trusting relationship between the health professional, the child, the family, and the community as partners in health practice.

Read more: brightfutures.org/mentalhealth/pdf/tools.html

Tips for Talking with Your Child about Learning Disabilities

“How to Help Kids Talk About Learning Disabilities” from the Child Mind Institute. Writer: Rae Jacobson. Sometimes opening up about learning differently is hard, but with practice, the rewards can be huge.

Read more: childmind.org/article/how-to-help-kids-talk-about-learning-disabilities/

All About Learning Disabilities - “Talking to Children About LD” from Idonline.org. Writer: Ania Siwek. A psychologist specializing in language-based learning disabilities explains how to talk to children about their LD: All the parts you need to be smart are in your brain. Nothing is missing or broken. The difference between your brain and one that doesn’t have an LD is that your brain gets “traffic jams” on certain highways.

Read more: ldonline.org/ld-topics/self-esteem-stress-management/talking-children-about-ld

Learning Differently 101 for Students from Project Eye to Eye

This free online program is intended for all students who learn differently that are currently enrolled (or entering) grades 5 through 8. Participants complete the course at their own pace online via the Thinkific platform, which takes approximately 90 minutes to complete. Once complete, participants will receive a Certificate of Achievement.

Read more: eyetoeyenational.org/learning-differently-101/

Books About the Disability Experience

Here are a few books we recommend when talking about the disability experience with your child:

For Early Ed & Beyond: [We Move Together](#) by Kelly Fritsch, Anne McGuire, and Eduardo Trejos. The story of a mixed-ability group of kids as they creatively negotiate everyday barriers and find joy and connection in disability culture and community.

For Older Elementary & Beyond: [I Am Not a Label: 34 disabled artists, thinkers, athletes and activists from past and present](#) by Cerrie Burnell. Short illustrated biographies of people who have faced unique challenges and are trailblazers, innovators, advocates, and artists and legends in their fields.

For Middle School & Beyond: [Demystifying Disability: What to Know, What to Say, and How to be an Ally](#) by Emily Ladau. An approachable guide to being a thoughtful, informed ally to disabled people, with actionable steps for what to say and do (and what not to do) and how you can help make the world a more accessible, inclusive place.

Example of an IEP

Page ____ of ____

**SAN FRANCISCO UNIFIED SELPA
INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP) - INFORMATION / ELIGIBILITY**

Student Name _____ Original _____ Date of Birth _____ IEP Date: _____

SpEd Entry Date _____ Next Annual IEP _____

Last Eval _____ Next Eval _____

Purpose of Meeting ☐ Initial ☐ Annual ☐ Triennial ☐ Transition ☐ Pre-Expulsion ☐ Interim ☐ Other _____

Age ____ Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female

Grade _____ Migrant ☐ Yes ☐ No Native Language _____

EL ☐ Yes ☐ No Redesignated ☐ Standard Reclassification ☐ Individualized Reclassification Interpreter ☐ Yes ☐ No

Student ID _____ SSN#: _____ SSID# _____

Residency _____

Parent/Guardian _____ Home Phone _____
Home Address _____ Work Phone _____
City _____ Cell Phone _____
State, Zip _____ CA, _____ Email Address _____

Parent/Guardian _____ Home Phone _____
Home Address _____ Work Phone _____
City _____ Cell Phone _____
State, Zip _____ CA, _____ Email Address _____

District of Residence: San Francisco Unified School District Residence School _____

Ethnicity: _____

Race 1. _____ Race 2. _____ Race 3. _____

INDICATE DISABILITY/IES

Primary _____ Secondary _____ * Low Incidence Disability

☐ Not Eligible for Special Education ☐ Exiting from Sp. ED. (returned to reg. ed/no longer eligible)

Describe how student's disability affects involvement and progress in general curriculum(or for preschoolers, participation in appropriate activities)

FOR INITIAL PLACEMENTS ONLY

Has the student received IDEA Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CEIS) using 15% of IDEA funding in the past two years? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Date of Initial Referral for Special Education Services _____

Person Initiating the Referral for Special Education service _____

Date District Received Parent Consent: _____

Date of Initial Meeting to Determine Eligibility _____

Definitions: Words to Get Familiar With

As you address your child's learning with teachers and other professionals, you will probably hear many terms that are new to you. The following is a guide to terms frequently used in educational settings. If you find that there are words being used that you do not understand, pause the process and ask the team to explain and clarify for you. (Can't find a term or acronym? Visit sfusd.edu/sped/definitions)

A

Accessibility: The “ability to access” the functionality and benefit of some system or entity. This term is used to describe the degree to which a product (such as a device, a service, or an environment) is accessible by as many people as possible.

Accommodations: Adaptations made for specific individuals with disabilities (as defined by law) when a product or service isn't accessible. These techniques and materials don't change the basic curriculum but do make learning a little easier or help kids communicate what they know.

Advocacy: Recognizing and communicating needs, rights, and interests on behalf of a child; making informed choices.

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR): A mediation for the resolution of complaints between parents and school district personnel in a cooperative forum of problem-solving conducted by skilled neutral facilitators who are not SFUSD employees.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): A federal civil rights law that provides legal protections for individuals with disabilities from discrimination in employment, state and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, telecommunications, and transportation. [Title II of the ADA](#) requires schools to make educational opportunities, extracurricular activities, and facilities open and accessible to all students.

Assessment: Process of identifying strengths and needs to assist in educational planning; includes observation, record review, interviews, and tests to develop appropriate educational programs, and to monitor progress.

Assessment Plan: The description of the battery of tests (psychological, achievement, language, etc.) to be used in a particular student's assessment.

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): ADHD is one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders of childhood. It is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. Children with ADHD may have trouble paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviors, or being overly active.

Auditory Processing: Ability to interpret auditory information.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): A complex, lifelong developmental condition that typically appears during early childhood and can impact a person's social skills, communication, relationships, and self-regulation.

B

Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) The Board Certified Behavior Analyst® (BCBA®) is a graduate-level certification in behavior analysis. Professionals certified at the BCBA level are independent practitioners who provide behavior-analytic services.

Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP): A BIP is a written plan to help a student who struggles to behave in class. It's designed to stop problem behaviors by rewarding good behaviors.

C

California Department of Education (CDE): The California Department of Education provides leadership, assistance, oversight and resources so that every Californian has access to an education.

Community Advisory Council for Special Education (CAC): A group of parents of children with disabilities, members of the community, students and special education professionals who advise the school board and school district administration about special education programs.

D

Dysarthria: Difficult or unclear articulation of speech usually occurs when the muscles you use for speech are weak or you have difficulty controlling them; affects ability to pronounce sounds correctly.

Dyscalculia: Difficulty in understanding numbers which can impact basic math skills; trouble calculating.

Dysgraphia: Difficulty writing legibly with age-appropriate speed.

Dyslexia: Difficulty in learning to read or interpret words, letters, and other symbols. Can make reading, writing, spelling, listening, speaking, and math challenging.

Dysnomia: Difficulty remembering names or recalling specific words; word-finding problems.

Dyspraxia: Difficulty performing and sequencing fine motor movements, such as buttoning.

E

Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS): Educationally Related Mental Health Services (ERMHS) are mental health services for students who qualify for special education.

Executive Function & Self Regulation Skills: The mental processes that enable us to plan, focus attention, remember, and juggle multiple tasks.

F

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): A federal law that regulates the management of student records and disclosure of information from those records, with its own administrative enforcement mechanism.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Entitles a public school child with a disability to an educational program and related services to meet their unique educational needs at no cost to the parents; based on IEP; under public supervision and meets state standards.

I

Inclusion [or] Inclusive Education: A belief that every student is entitled to an instructional program that meets his or her individual needs and learning characteristics; a commitment to build and maintain an assured sense of belonging for all students, regardless of strengths or challenges.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The nation's main law governing specific rights of K-12 students with disabilities, [IDEA](#) entitles all public school students to a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

Individualized Education Program (IEP): An IEP is a plan developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and is attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services.

Informed Consent: Agreement in writing from parents that they have been informed and understand implications of special education evaluation and program decisions; permission is voluntary and may be withdrawn.

L

Local Education Area (LEA): A school district. In an IEP meeting, the LEA Representative is the person who is at the meeting to represent the school district.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): A term meaning that children with disabilities must be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with children without disabilities.

M

Meaningful Participation: Federal and state law require that parents of a child with a disability must be given an opportunity to participate in meetings regarding the identification, assessment, educational placement, and provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to their child.

Modification: Modifications are changes in the delivery, content, or instructional level of a subject or test. They result in changed or lowered expectations and create a different standard for kids with disabilities than for those without disabilities.

N

Non-public school (NPS): A private placement under contract with the district and certified by the state, to service pupils with disabilities whose needs can not be served by the special education programs offered within the SFUSD.

O

Occupational Therapy: Meaningful activities to help children and youth participate in what they need and/or want to do in order to promote physical and mental health and well-being.

Orientation and Mobility: Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialists teach children and adults who have visual impairments the specific orientation skills used to find one's way in the environment and the mobility skills needed to travel safely and efficiently at home, school, work, and in the community.

P

Primary Language: Language that the child first learned, or the language that's spoken in the home.

Prior Written Notice (PWN): A Prior Written Notice (PWN) is a document that informs (provides notice to) a parent/guardian/education rights holder of actions that the school intends to take in regard to their child's Individualized Education Program. It is important that parents understand what the school plans to do (or not do) for their child.

Procedural Safeguards: Legal requirements that ensure parents and kids will be treated fairly and equally in the decision-making process about special education.

Progress Reports: Inform parents of their child's progress toward each annual goal; determine whether progress is sufficient for their child to achieve the goals by the annual IEP due date; a copy must be sent home to parent/guardian when report cards are sent out.

R

Related Services: The term for those services a disabled child needs in order to benefit from special education. Related services include speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and rehabilitation counseling are related services. Transportation to school is a related service.

Resource Specialist Program (RSP): Students who can participate in regular education may also receive special education instruction in the RSP. These students can receive services within the classroom, or can be "pulled out" of the regular education classroom for special assistance during specific periods of the day or week and are taught by credentialed teachers.

Retention: The practice of having a student repeat a certain grade-level (year) in school.

S

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (504): Prohibits discrimination in the education of children and youth with disabilities; vocational education; college and other post-secondary programs; employment; health, welfare and other social programs that receive federal funds.

Self-Advocacy: Child's ability to explain specific learning needs and seek necessary assistance or accommodations.

Special Day Class (SDC): Students in Special Day Classes (SDC) are enrolled in self-contained special education classes. They are assigned to these classes by their IEP eligibility and receive support from the Special Day Class teacher and the support staff.

Special Education (SPED): Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of eligible kids whose educational needs can't be met through the regular instructional program; provides for a range of options for services, such as pull out programs, special day classes; available to kids enrolled in public schools.

Special Education Local Plan Area (SELPA): The county office from which some special education services are funded; SFUSD is both a local school district and the county office for San Francisco.

Specialized Academic Instruction (SAI): Instruction that is determined by the IEP team and is derived from assessment information, data collected, and goals/objectives developed in the student's area(s) of need. Each student's educational needs are unique; thus, SAI and services may vary greatly between students.

Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs): Individuals who assess and treat people who have speech, language, voice, and fluency disorders.

T

Transition: Process of preparing kids to function in future environments and emphasizing movement from one educational program to another, such as from elementary school to middle school, or from school to work.

U

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): A way to optimize teaching to effectively instruct a diverse group of learners. It emphasizes accessibility in how students access material, engage with it, and show what they have learned. UDL can be applied to in-person or virtual educational settings.

V

Visual Processing: Ability to interpret visual information.

Can't find what you are looking for? Visit sfusd.edu/sped/definitions for more definitions and a glossary of terms in multiple languages.



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